



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

**Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations**

**Washington, DC 20420
(202) 273-5700
www.va.gov**

Fact Sheet

January 2004

VA Services for Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom

Seamless Transition From Active Duty

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) are working as partners to meet the needs of our newest veterans – the men and women who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom – by creating a seamless transition from active duty to civilian life.

VA's goal is to ensure that every seriously injured or ill serviceman and woman returning from combat receives priority consideration and world-class service. Together VA and DoD are finding ways to move records more efficiently between the two agencies; share critical medical information electronically; protect the health of troops stationed in areas where environmental hazards pose threat; process benefit claims as one shared system; and, in every way possible, hold open the doors to an uncomplicated passage from soldier to citizen.

Enhanced Employee Awareness

VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi initiated an awareness campaign in August 2003 to enhance continuity of VA services for our newest returning war veterans. In a letter to all employees, Secretary Principi said:

“Every VA employee has an obligation to ensure that each veteran who is wounded, injured, or ill from training for, preparing for, or fighting the war against terror receives priority service ... The men and women who embody our department now have the rarest of opportunities: another chance to make a first impression. Our actions over the next few months will define our department for the lifetime of the veterans who are now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Changes that followed were aimed at sensitizing employees to our newest war veterans and improving access to VA programs. Through messages on paycheck stubs, e-mails, memos, conference calls and closed-circuit television programs, Secretary Principi and his under secretaries for health and benefits have alerted field employees to be especially sensitive to the needs of our newest disabled war veterans.

- More -

Seamless Transition – 2/2/2/2

VA Expands Outreach

In 2003, VA increased the staffing of benefits counselors at key military hospitals where severely wounded service members from Iraq and Afghanistan are frequently sent.

Currently, five staff members are assigned full-time and one assigned part-time to work bedside with patients at both the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC and the Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland. Four of the counselors specialize in benefit programs and two are social workers who facilitate health care coordination as service members move from military to VA care.

On an as-needed basis, similar teams are committed to work with patients, discharge planners, and other military staff at three other DoD medical centers serving as key medical centers caring for seriously injured troops: Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Ft. Gordon (GA); Brooke Army Medical Center, Ft. Sam Houston (TX); and Madigan Army Medical Center at Western Regional Medical Command, Tacoma (WA).

Throughout the nation, VA officials work with military disability retirement lists staffs to identify service members from Iraq or Afghanistan for special outreach efforts. Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom coordinators at each VA benefit office and medical center coordinate with DoD discharge staff to ensure a smooth transition to VA services at locations nearest to the veteran's residence after discharge. Through this coordination, the veterans are known at the local VA facilities which process their benefits claims and continuity of their medical care, including medications and therapy, is assured.

Benefits and Services

Every active-duty service member, Reservist or National Guards member who serves in a theater of combat operations is eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for injuries or illnesses he or she believes is related to combat service for a period up to two years beginning on the date of discharge or release from service. This two-year eligibility for medical care is available even if there is insufficient medical evidence available to conclude that the veteran's illness is the result of combat service. At the end of the two-year period, these veterans have the same eligibility for VA medical care as veterans of earlier conflicts.

VA offers a spectrum of health care and benefit programs for veterans of the war on terrorism, including disability compensation, vocational rehabilitation, prosthetic services, life insurance, pension, education benefits, specially adapted housing and automobile grants, and survivor and burial benefits. Many VA services are provided at a higher priority or on an expedited basis for this newest generation of combat-disabled veterans. VA programs for veterans with a service-connected injury or illness apply equally to those who served in the regular active duty forces and to National Guard members or reservists returning from federal activation.

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Seamless Transition – 3/3/3/3

Additional Resources

VA has brochures and other information for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom available on the Web:

Veterans Benefits Information	http://www.vba.va.gov/
Information for Iraqi Freedom Veterans	http://www.va.gov/gulfwar/
Afghanistan Service Information	http://www.va.gov/environagents/
PTSD and Iraq Veterans	http://www.ncptsd.org/topics/war.html
VA Health Care Enrollment Information	http://www.va.gov/elig/
Brochures and Publications, Including: * A Summary of VA Benefits for National Guard and Reserve Personnel * Health Care and Assistance for U.S. Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom	http://www.vethealth.cio.med.va.gov/Pubs/Index.htm
Online Benefits Applications	http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/
Women Veterans Health and Benefits Information	http://www.va.gov/wvhp/ http://www.va.gov/womenvet/ http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Topics/Women/



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VA Benefits For Active Duty Personnel

- Medal of Honor pension is payable to service members.
- Service members who remain on active duty are eligible for payment of the automobile allowance and adaptive equipment.
- With the passage of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003, active duty personnel are eligible for specially adapted housing and special home adaptation grants.
- Home loan guaranty is available to active duty personnel after serving 181 days (or 90 days during the Gulf War era, which extends to current deployments).
- On April 17, 2003, under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 8111A, the Secretary directed VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to give priority care to active duty personnel involved in armed conflict in Iraq. He directed that VHA accomplish this function by providing care through the use of sharing agreements between VA facilities and DOD TRICARE contractors.
- Service members and reservists are eligible for up to a maximum of \$250,000 in life insurance under SGLI. Coverage for spouses is available up to a maximum of \$100,000 while children are automatically covered for \$10,000 at no cost.
- VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) offers counseling and claims assistance to separating service members throughout the U.S. and around the world in the Transition Assistance Program and Disabled Transition Assistance Program (TAP/DTAP) program. Claims for benefits are prepared and adjudicated prior to separation by VBA through the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program.
- Education benefits are available to active duty personnel who have served for at least two years and contributed to Chapter 30, the Montgomery GI Bill, and to selected reservists and National Guardsman that are certified as eligible under Chapter 1606. Chapter 30 is limited to payment for tuition and fees while Chapter 1606 provides a monthly stipend.
- For help with VA benefits and health care contact your installation VA military service representative, use our toll-free hotline (800-827-1000), or visit the VA website, www.va.gov.